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RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 2051
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4942
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 9838
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 0245
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 7584
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 3943
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 9430
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 4525
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 002177

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DEPT FOR SCA/INS, SCA/PPD, ECA/A. R, DRL

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TAGS: [PGOV PHUM PREL PINR SCUL IN PK](#)

SUBJECT: NEW PUNJABI LEADERSHIP SEEKS EDUCATIONAL
COLLABORATION WITH U.S.

REF: A. NEW DELHI 666

[1](#)B. 06 NEW DELHI 6886

[1](#)C. NEW DELHI 1977

[1](#)D. NEW DELHI 1681

[1](#)E. NEW DELHI 2127

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Classified By: PolCouns Ted Osius for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: During a May 2 meeting with POLCOUNS in Chandigarh, Punjab Chief Secretary Ramesh Inder Singh and Principal Secretary to the Punjab Chief Minister D.S. Guru discussed opportunities for India/U.S. education cooperation, water and electricity subsidies, relations with Pakistan, and female feticide. Singh noted the need for Punjab to invest in education so that the state will continue progressing into the 21st century. Additionally, Guru highlighted Punjab's three tier initiative to tackle the grossly imbalanced gender ratio and cut the prevalence of female feticide, claiming significant gains since the 2001 Census (ref A). Although Punjab held one of the worst gender ratios in the nation at 798:1000 (females:males), Guru stated that recent state surveys indicate the ratio has improved to 870:1000. Singh and Guru pointed to agriculture and education as the primary areas where India and the U.S. should focus attention to strengthen the bilateral relationship. Punjab held elections in February 2007; this cable documents the first official interaction with the new Shiromani Akali Dal/Bharatiya Janata Party (Akali/BJP) government under the leadership of Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal. END SUMMARY.

Scouting for Education Cooperation

¶2. (SBU) On May 2, in the Punjab capital of Chandigarh, POLCOUNS met with the state Chief Secretary Ramesh Inder Singh and Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister D.S. Guru to discuss opportunities for Punjab/U.S. collaboration. Highlighting the need to invest in their human capital,⁸ and catch up with the more progressive Southern states in this regard, Singh outlined Punjab's education development plans. The Punjab government intends to set up a national institute for science and research in Mohali, modeled after the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology and Management (IITs and IIMs). Singh noted that agricultural research was stagnant in Punjab. In order to revitalize this area, the Agricultural University in Ludhiana recently hired an American-educated quantitative genetics professor as Vice Chancellor. Singh felt that a professor, with so many linkages⁸ to the U.S. will provide many benefits to the university.

¶3. (SBU) Singh expressed interest in deepening U.S./Punjab linkages in public/private education ventures, with an eye towards establishing joint management institutes. One of Punjab's highest priorities, he related, is to boost its management capacity, as well as its biotechnology and nanotechnology expertise. Currently, in order to get a job, management and technology graduates in India must possess a degree from an institution accredited by the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE). Parliament is considering a bill to exempt universities with 100 percent foreign direct investment (FDI) from AICTE accreditation requirements, saving them from a lengthy bureaucratic

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process. Hopeful that the bill would pass, Singh told POLCOUNS that the Punjab government is actively scouting for potential U.S. partners to create a management school and is offering government land (Note: In Punjab land is an increasingly valuable asset, valued at approximately \$250,000/acre near Chandigarh. End Note.), as equity in the partnership.

¶4. (SBU) Singh also indicated that the current debate over proposed quotas for Other Backward Castes (refs B, C, & D) would not impact foreign universities as they could figure out a way around it.⁸ Dispelling any notions that the school would be a charity,⁸ Singh pointed to the India School of Business (ISB) in Hyderabad (affiliated with the Kellogg School of Management - Northwestern University and University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business). ISB charges \$40,000 per student and runs a fully residential program. Singh hoped Punjab would establish a school in that category. POLCOUNS described A/S Hughes' recent visit to India with a delegation of American University Presidents and said we would share Punjab's interest in educational collaboration with Washington and facilitate interactions.

Water Issues

¶5. (SBU) Singh noted that water issues are a ticklish⁸ subject politically. He asserted that Punjabi farmers enjoy fewer subsidies than American farmers. Singh agreed with POLCOUNS that people value water more and waste less when they have to pay for, but countered that electricity and water subsidies for rural farmers are too difficult politically to eliminate. Singh reported that there have been no further developments regarding the dispute with neighboring state, Haryana over sharing the waters of the Yamuna River, as the issue is out of their hands and before the courts.

Bettering Relations with Pakistan

16. (SBU) Indicating that the previous government did much to develop Punjab/Pakistan trade, Singh contended the new Punjab government in Chandigarh needed to continue and deepen this trend. However, Singh pointed out the tepid and slow GOP reaction to India's grant to Pakistan of most favored nation status. Additionally, he asserted that although trade barriers can and should be brought down, national security must remain a top priority. Singh declared that the entire region would benefit economically from better trade relations, so the entire region and Punjab could not escape this trend. He also expressed a commitment to deepening "people to people" contact, hoping to stimulate greater interaction and opportunity growth. POLCOUNS explained USG policy regarding the India/Pakistan relationship and emphasized that greater economic integration could benefit South and Central Asia.

Attacking Female Feticide, Denying Trafficking

17. (SBU) Asked about female feticide, Guru, the former Health Secretary, reported that the gender disparity in Punjab is

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less than that indicated by the 2001 Census. Punjab has done

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subsequent surveys which document the gender ratio has increased from 798/1000 to 870/1000 since 2001. He attributed the increase in the number of females to a three tiered approach adopted that includes: 1) implementation and enforcement of the Prenatal Determination and Testing Act (PNDT), which criminalizes fetal gender determination and abortion based on gender; 2) raising awareness in schools, newspapers, and communities; and 3) government programs which provide monetary awards to families with girls and villages who neutralize their gender ratio disparity. Guru and Singh noted that the mindset in Punjab is a holdover from an earlier feudal society in which girls were kept indoors. He expressed optimism at the progress Punjab is seeing and noted that girls are viewed more and more as a fruitful part of society.

18. (C) Guru unequivocally denied that trafficking is a problem in the state. (Note: A series of high profile stories broke after a BJP Member of Parliament, Babubhai Khatara, was arrested attempting to smuggle a woman and child into the U.S. (ref E). The subsequent investigation has revealed high level GOI officials involved in smuggling numerous Punjabis into the US and other countries. End Note).

Comment: A Stable State Searching for Opportunity

19. (C) Punjab has strong international linkages due to a large diaspora. It is stable, with little communal tension. Religious harmony, Singh noted, is embodied by the Akali/BJP political coalition (a Sikh party and a Hindu party) -- although he characterized relations between the two parties as only cordial. In addition to agriculture, Singh noted education as a key area for U.S./Punjab cooperation and coordination and urged USG facilitation in finding partners for higher education joint ventures, especially in the areas of management, biotechnology, and nanotechnology. Although recent arrests of high level GOI officials involved in an elaborate network of human smuggling led to media reports portraying Punjab as a nerve center for human smuggling, the government denies that it is a problem. End Comment.
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